

SHADES OF THE PAST

By CHARLES CAREY

"A Woman to Win," "The Van Suyden Sapphires," Etc.

Synopsis of Chapters Already Published

Robert Graham, a young New York lawyer, having rescued from a hotel fire and fallen in love with Gladys Corlett, the daughter of a millionaire, proceeds home to find a woman lying insensible on the doorstep of his boarding house. She is Gladys Montgomery, a young girl, who has been lured to the city by a villain under the promise of marriage, and then deserted. With a blizzard raging, and only 25 cents in his pocket, Graham finally gives up his own room to her, and when he learns the next day that her father has repudiated her, still keeps her concealed there, until he has been able to secure her a regular boarding place and a position in the office where he himself works. Meanwhile, the Corletts have been endeavoring to show their gratitude, the father retaining Robert in an important case, the daughter inviting him to dine with her. The note of invitation, however, is intercepted by William Warwick, a cousin of Gladys, who boards in the same house with Graham, and has discovered the presence of the girl secreted in the other's room. Warwick watches for the departure of Robert and Gladys, and follows them to the "Rovers," an East Side restaurant, where they have planned to take refuge. He has been waiting for Graham to put in an appearance, and by a series of clever lies and insinuations, induces her to accompany him to the "Rovers."

CHAPTER XI.

"COUSIN WILL."

WILLIAM WARWICK was the son of Mr. Corlett's only sister, and the generous uncle had done everything in his power to give the lad a favorable start in life.

He not only defrayed all of Warwick's rather heavy expenses at preparatory school and college, but offered further to fit him for any profession he might select.

The young man having decided upon a business career, however, he took him into the paint works, which were the corner-stone and chief source of the Corlett fortune.

It was the millionaire's idea to advance his nephew constantly into positions of greater responsibility, until he should finally be in supreme charge of the big establishment; and for a time, it must be confessed, Warwick made fair to realize his hopes.

Carried along by enthusiasm, and easily mastering the details of the business—for he was shrewd enough when he chose to apply himself—the boy progressed rapidly, and became in a surprisingly short period right-hand man and confidential adviser to the head of the house.

The goal which his uncle had planned for him was fairly in view. A few years more of diligence and study, and he would be in the saddle. But unfortunately, Warwick was of a reckless, dissipated nature—one of the sort to lose hold upon the substance in order to grasp at the shadow.

The monotonous routine began to pall upon him. Believing himself more clever than he really was, he commenced to regard himself as wasting his talents. Moreover, he had gotten in with a money-spending set and his salary—generous though it was—found inadequate for his needs.

In the end he threw over his shoulder the prospects of affluence and reputation, and went to the city, where he had heard that he could "beat the game" and achieve a fortune.

Corlett was naturally disappointed at this defection; but it was a part of his creed that every human being has a right to choose his own course, and he interposed no objection. He strove, indeed, to conceal the wound to his feelings, allowing their separation to make no difference in his show of kindness and affection toward his sister's son.

He even came to the rescue on more than one occasion when the harem-brained youth, finding the "game" not so easy to beat as he had imagined, could otherwise have sustained heavy losses.

But at last, when he learned upon unmistakable testimony that Warwick was using these evidences of bounty to an ulterior advantage, letting it be understood abroad that the uncle was his backer and secret partner, especially in some rather shady operations, the old man showed a different side to his nature.

There was a short but decisive interview between the two in which the magnate did most of the talking; and although Corlett did not go to the length of breaking off all relations with his nephew, or forbidding him the house, he made it plain that their future intercourse was to be of the most formal and restricted character.

Warwick had, of course, no one but himself to blame for this state of affairs; but he chose to consider himself deeply wronged, and he thereupon cherished a malevolent grudge against his former benefactor, vowing secretly that he would be avenged upon the very first opportunity.

His subsequent career, deprived of its fictitious support—for, much as he was tempted, he no longer dared make capital out of that of the ordinary market plunger.

At times he was flush with money, but he was everything coming his way; but more generally he was hard pressed for funds, compelled to live upon credit, put to all manner of shifts to keep up appearances.

Just at present his affairs were in a particularly bad way. He had been forced to give up his luxurious bachelor apartments, to seek more economical quarters at Mrs. Ewells', and this was only one of the many straits to which he had been pushed.

Indeed, so involved was he that, taking even the most optimistic view, he could see nothing but ruin and shipwreck ahead, unless he was able to make a very speedy and substantial raise from some quarter.

In this exigency the old, unreasonable timidity against his uncle assumed new bitterness. Why, he asked himself, should he be such a hobbler that he could not find ways of spending his income? To Warwick it was a manifest injustice.

Yet, rack his brains as he might, he could conceive no method of relieving his Uncle Vernon from any of the latter's surplus funds. It was worse than idle, he knew, to apply for a loan, or indulge in any form of open appeal, and while he had small scruples against darker measures, he saw no feasible means by which they could be accomplished.

Then a brilliant inspiration suddenly dawned upon him. Why not marry Gladys? It would have to be accomplished with the utmost circumspection, it is true, for the old man, if he knew of it, would set his face like a flint against such a union. Nevertheless, once wed, there was not the slightest doubt that he would accept the situation, and, for his beloved daughter's sake, do the proper thing by her husband.

The more Warwick considered the project the more alluring did it appear to him. He was not in the slightest degree in love with his cousin, but he liked her well enough, and he knew that in winning her he would be widely envied.

On the whole, if he was to marry at all, this defection; but it was a part of his creed that every human being has a right to choose his own course, and he interposed no objection. He strove, indeed, to conceal the wound to his feelings, allowing their separation to make no difference in his show of kindness and affection toward his sister's son.

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"I will be in a position to put the screws to him then in good shape," chuckled Warwick. "He'll soon be made to understand that the measure of his liberality will determine just the sort of treatment that Gladys is to receive."

He never doubted it will be noticed that the girl herself would be willing; his boundless conceit prevented that. The only point which troubled him was how to keep the old man in the dark until the binding vows had been exchanged.

Gladys, he was well assured, if given a chance to reflect, would never consent to approach the altar, or even become engaged without her father's sanction; hence the whole affair must be arranged upon the spur of the moment.

A precipitate avowal on his part and a demand for no delay, with a minister at hand to tie the knot before she could recover from her fluster and surprise.

He had, however, a number of episodes that appeal to many women, and he believed it the only feasible scheme he could devise; yet he was unable to deny there were many difficulties in the way, chief among them that the laws of New York forbade a marriage between first cousins.

How he was to get around that formidable barrier he was at a loss to tell, but finally he decided upon a device, calling upon Gladys she chanced to mention that she expected to leave the next week to visit a friend at Wilmington, Del.

Instantly Warwick saw daylight ahead. He could hardly repress the shout of triumph which rose to his lips.

"Delaware! Could anything have fallen out better?" Delaware had no impeding legal restrictions which could bother him, and Wilmington was far next week to talk of her marriage with him, and he was up of some plausible excuse to account for his haste.

In a twinkling his plans were laid. He would descend protectively during her stay, plunge at once into a passionate wooing and before she had time to balk or hesitate whisk her to a convenient church and have the marriage rites performed, averring that it was her father's wish that there should be no delay.

It was a bold scheme, yet like many another might have succeeded through its sheer audacity. But, unfortunately, for Mr. Warwick, just two days before Gladys projected visit, there occurred the Park Avenue Hotel fire.

He had been busily engaged that evening, and the first he heard of the catastrophe was when he stumbled into his club late that stormy night to get a hot toddy before starting home.

Some one was in full swing of recounting the story of Miss Corlett's rescue, and Warwick, overhearing the main points of the recital, set down his glass half emptied and rushed up to the narrator.

"Who did you say the fellow was that carried her out?" he queried interestedly. "Some fireman?"

"Not a bit of it," rejoined the man who was telling the story. "It was a good-looking young lawyer from Evers & Van Duxey, named Graham, believe. And they say, by Jove, he next week got her out of the burning building, but carried her in his arms clear over to the Waldorf. Ought to be something of a romance come out of that."

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come out of it, eh? Well, not if they should find Robert and the girl still together at the restaurant; and Warwick rather thought that they would.

CHAPTER XII.

THE RESCUED ROSE.

THE RIPOIN steak had long since disappeared; yet Robert and Gladys lingered over their little table, when Warwick ushered his companion into the "Rovers."

The experience had been a delightful one for Graham. Freed at last from the worries and perplexities which had beset him all day, and enjoying that approbation of conscience which comes from a good deed worthily performed, he felt like a person taking some child out for a treat, as he listened to the naive comments of the unsophisticated girl, and explained to her the nature of the duties she was about to take up in her new position.

In short, Robert was enjoying himself. Intoxicated by the shy, adoring glances of the wide violet eyes, he dabbled over his cigarette, and allowed his manner to become every moment more and more paternally condescending.

To see their heads bent close together, his with an air of protecting guardianship, hers in confiding trust, one would never have supposed them anything less than intimates of long standing, probably lovers.

Across the warm sense of satisfaction in which he was basking, however, there came a distinct chill, a sort of prescience that all was not well.

Involuntarily, he raised his eyes, and there, looking at him from the doorway, away from him, stood the real lady of his dreams.

In short, Robert appeared now, though, from the frightened, submissive maiden he had borne through smoke-filled corridors, or even the delectable goddess he had carried safe from the storm.

A flush of resentment dyed her cheek. Her lips were curved in a smile of contempt, her dark eyes were like those of an angry feline.

With a withered exclamation, Graham started to his feet. He forgot for the moment his companion; he took no note of Warwick or of any one else in the room; his gaze was transfixed by Gladys's affronted countenance so unexpectedly presented to him.

For a moment he stood staring at her thus, depicting in his astonishment a perfect representation of guilty surprise; then with a slight laugh, he turned to the head of the table, and he sank back, gasping, into his seat.

He was dazed and stupefied. How, he asked himself, had he offended her, for the dumbest intelligence could see that she was seriously provoked. Surely, the fact of his having another woman out to dinner could not be the cause of her umbrage.

But if he had expected to get a bitter reproof from his companion, as he became conscious that his companion across the table was appealing to him in urgent entreaty.

She was white-faced and shaken, her eyes dilated with terror. She caught nervously at his hand.

A box of Ivory Soap—can you think of a better wedding present?

True, it is somewhat out-of-the-ordinary, but that is in its favor, rather than the reverse.

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"Oh, let us get away from here," she begged. "Let us leave at once."

"Yes," assented Graham dully. "There is nothing to keep us here."

He assisted her on with her coat automatically and led the way to the door. Not once did he glance in the direction of Gladys, but he did think of inquiring into the cause of Gladys's perturbation until they were well outside.

Then she confided it to him of her own accord. "I saw him there," she said in a low, strained voice.

"Him?"

"The one who got me to leave home. The dark man who passed just beside our table. Didn't you notice him?"

Graham could only shake his head. He had had eyes for but one figure, and it never occurred to him now to connect the recreant knight of poor Gladys's shattered romance with the escort of his divinity.

His curiosity aroused by her information, however, he halted and halted to go back; but she besought him so earnestly not to get into trouble for her sake, or involve her in possible notoriety, that he reconsidered his purpose, and went on with her to her lodgings.

Meanwhile, Warwick having selected a table and given his order, was watching Gladys with a flicker of amusement in his half shut eyes.

Was that your expected glomg? "Guest, was it not?" he ventured finally. "Last night's gallant hero?"

But if he had expected to get a bitter reply he found himself mistaken. She was too proud to show that her wound ran deep.

"Yes, that is Mr. Graham," she said, carelessly. "Evidently he had a prior engagement."

"Hark! a flattering choice to you, though," he persisted. "For all that baby face of hers, his companion is—well, pretty well known in the tenderloin."

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